

Cupola House  
Edenton  
Chowan County  
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-2

HABS  
NC  
21-ED-ET  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of North Carolina

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Headquarters Office  
for District of North Carolina

CUPOLA HOUSE  
(originally a residence, now used as a library and museum)  
Edenton, North Carolina

HABS  
NC  
21-ED-ET  
3-

Owner: Cupola House Association

Date of Erection: 1758 or earlier.

Architect:

Builder: Francis Corbin? (Owner) *perhaps built before Corbin's tenure*

Present Condition: The building is in good condition and well preserved. It appears very little changed from its original state with the exception that some of the interior woodwork and paneling has been removed and a porch added on the front. The roof is now covered with composition shingles.

Number of Stories: Two stories and attic

Materials of Construction: Brick foundation walls and chimneys. Superstructure frame covered with beaded weatherboards. The interior woodwork is pine painted, and the floors are also pine.

Other Existing Records:

Additional Data: Francis Corbin (the builder) was the land agent of Lord Granville, the Lord Proprietor, who owned one half of the Province of North Carolina. He built it for Jean Jungs to whom he was engaged and who died before the house was completed. Later he married Jean Innes, a widow of the Cape Fear. Corbin was accused, justly or unjustly, of the unlawful levy of exorbitant fees, and in 1759 he was forced to resign his office. He lived, however, to redeem his reputation. Before his death in 1767 he had played an important part in effecting the completion of St. Paul's Church, he had been made a colonel of militia, and he had become a leading spirit in the affairs of Edenton. In 1777 Francis Corbin's brother, Edward, his executor, sold the house to Dr. Samuel Dickinson, in whose family it remained until 1920, when the last heir, Miss Tillie Bond, sold it to the Cupola House Association for the Shepherd-Pruden Memorial Library and Museum. Prior to this, Miss Bond had sold the interior of the eight-

eenth century parlor to the Brooklyn Museum. (Reference: Cupola House Association)

"The exterior of the house built by Francis Corbin had one feature which was so rarely seen in the South, although common in New England, that it was considered worthy of record. Reference is made to the overhanging second story which, with its carved pendants, has been reproduced here. A photograph of the house in Edenton, placed in the gallery, shows this and also the large brick chimneys built on the outside and narrowing toward the top in the way usual with Southern builders. In New England the rooms were built around the chimneys in order to conserve every bit of heat, but this was not the practice in the South where the climate was milder and open fires were more of a luxury than a necessity. Each of the three main rooms has a fireplace opening from three separate chimneys. At the time the Museum acquired the rooms, the house was in a state of neglect; but it has since been taken over by the townspeople and is now used as a Public Library and Historical Society.

Opening the finely panelled front door, one finds oneself in a hallway which runs directly through the house and from which two rooms open on either side, a living-room and a bedroom on the left, a dining-room and pantry (not open at present) on the right. Stairs rise from the back hall turning to a landing and again above it. The handrail has been skillfully accommodated to the turn; and there is a window on the landing, another proof of the competence of the builder. In the panelled dining-room the original color scheme was a blue-green, or "verditer" as it was then called, for the walls, with cupboard lining of vermillion and a red marble for the fireplace. The color scheme has been kept. An interesting point is that the ceiling over the mantel has been cut out to make room for an ornamental pediment, not only in the dining-room but also over two of the doors in the hall. Throughout the house the architectural features bear witness to the interest of the times in Colonial architecture. The classic orders have been quite closely followed with emphasis on mouldings which, sometimes plain but more often enriched with carving, are used at doorways, fireplaces and as cornices with great skill in achieving a decorative effect. A parallel development is seen in the furniture, which shows decided changes taking place in the middle of the XVIIIth Century with the introduction of the Chippendale type, bringing greater elaboration both in design and in ornament. In the dining-room the center table with chairs, a side table and a cellolette are furnishings suitable for a Southern home of the period. Portraits, painted by some of the important painters of the South, such as Jeremiah Theus and John Wollaston, hang on the walls; and lighting is effected by a set of four sconces with candles placed before looking-glasses. Chinese porcelain plates carry out the color scheme of the vermillion cupboard in bright enamelled colors.

In the living-room the walls are plastered above and below a wide chair rail. Finely carved trim of Carolina pine, stained

to represent walnut, is used at windows, doorway, cornice and fireplace, which is equally as fine as that in the dining-room although quite different in detail. Sofa and chairs upholstered in red damask, a tea table with a porcelain tea set and a desk with roundabout chair before it make the room attractive and homelike. In this room, as in the dining-room, there are windows on either side of the fireplace, giving the advantage of added sunlight and air from two exposures and making it possible for one seated before the fire to look out into the garden.

As in so many of the Southern homes, the kitchen of this house was in a separate building; and the fourth room of the ground floor was used as a bedroom. On the canopied bedstead is a spread embroidered in crewels in the designs popular with needlewomen of that time, who no longer looked with favor on the all-over embroidery of the earlier period nor on the practice of using curtains at all four bedposts. Dressing tables and chairs complete the furnishings. Special notice should be taken of the mantelpiece of marbleized wood which is distinguished by an especially fine series of mouldings.

This house represents a high degree of development in Colonial homes; for its owner was a man of refinement and good taste, and Edenton was then socially and culturally one of the most important of the Colonial towns." (Reference: A Guide to The American Rooms of The Brooklyn Museum by Elizabeth Haynes)

The interior woodwork removed from the Cupola House is in the Brooklyn Museum.

Author: Eugene Brodsky.

Approved: JW. 12/27/40

N.B. It should be noted that the date on the gable finial is applied, not carved, and thus we may not accurately indicate the year of building.

DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED  
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CUPOLA HOUSE  
Edenton, Chowan County, North Carolina

Owner: Cupola House Association

Date of erection: 1758 or earlier

Present condition: Good

Description:

Frame; two stories; gable roof; end chimneys brick, Flemish and English bond; center door with geometric panels and transom; five bays; lower sash 9/9 lights, paneled shutters; upper sash 6/9 lights, louvered blinds; large roof gable at center of building with elliptical window in apex. Octagonal cupola on roof; four windows, 6/6-light sash; heavy modillioned cornice and ogee roof. Gabled stoop at front door. Framed overhang occurs across the front, supported on heavy brackets. All gables have carved finials, that in center having applied inscription "F. C. 1758." The inscription may be an addition.

The interior was elaborately paneled, but all first-floor finish except the stair has been removed to the Museum at Brooklyn, New York. The stair is walnut, with ramp balustrades, turned newels, and carved brackets. The upstairs front rooms have paneling and excellent mantelpieces.

*Thomas T. Waterman*  
11/1/40

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